



THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE  
FOR OHIO VETERANS

W I N T E R • 2 0 0 2

# Veterans' Health



Could it be  
post-traumatic  
stress disorder?

---

Diabetes:

A disease you can  
control—or prevent

---

Updated  
pharmacy  
co-payment



# Making a commitment

I am honored to have been selected as the new Network Director for VISN 10. The coming year brings many financial challenges due to the escalating costs of healthcare and medications. In response to this, the VA is changing the co-payment for medications received for a nonservice-connected condition on an outpatient basis. Some veterans will still be exempt from the co-payment. Please see page 3 for more information.

Recent events and continued threats of terrorism have affected us all. For some who experienced previous overwhelming events such as war, violent crime or other trauma, the events of September 11 may have triggered painful memories resulting in a condition known as post-traumatic stress disorder. To learn more about its symptoms and treatment, turn to pages 4 and 5.

We have all read about how lifestyle is related to development of many diseases, such as diabetes. To find out what can be done to control and even prevent this disease, which affects about 16 million Americans, see page 6.

A reminder: Don't forget to get your flu and pneumovax vaccinations if you haven't already. This is especially important if you have a chronic disease such as asthma, diabetes or heart or lung problems.

Changes may occur in VISN 10, but my commitment to you is to continue to provide quality, convenient and timely healthcare. I welcome any ideas to make things better for the veterans we are honored to treat.



—Clyde Parkis, Network Director




I complained about care you provided, taking long hours, waiting to be seen. Happily, the problem we had in Springfield was taken care of. The waiting time is much shorter and not as tiring as before. Much better.

Your staff has always been the best—friendly, helpful and caring. You wouldn't want a better group of people. I don't mind going to the clinic anymore. I applaud the whole staff for doing an excellent job.

—James R. Hosier, Urbane, Ohio

## Drugs recalled

The Federal Drug Administration (FDA) recently issued a drug recall for products containing phenylpropanolamine. The ingredient is used in many over-the-counter cough and cold medications as a decongestant and in over-the-counter weight-loss products. Studies have linked phenylpropanolamine to increased risk of hemorrhagic stroke, or bleeding in the brain, in women. The FDA

recommends that everyone, including men and children, seek an alternative medicine. To identify recalled drugs, look for phenylpropanolamine listed as an active ingredient on the label. For more information, log onto [www.fda.gov/cder/drug/infopage/ppa/default.htm](http://www.fda.gov/cder/drug/infopage/ppa/default.htm) 

*Veterans' Health* is published quarterly as a patient education service by VA Healthcare System of Ohio, one of the 22 integrated networks of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The publication is intended to provide information to help you stay well, manage your healthcare and learn about the many health services available through the VA. This publication is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your doctor. All articles may be reproduced for educational purposes.

The Mission of the VA Healthcare System of Ohio is:

- To provide veterans a continuum of care that is accessible, value-added and cost-effective, and of the highest quality, within an environment of outstanding education and research.
- To promote a culture that supports and develops a caring, compassionate, competent and quality-oriented workforce.

COVER PHOTO: MARK ARLINGHAUS, PHOTOGRAPHER, MEDICAL MEDIA, CINCINNATI VA CAMPUS

### *Veterans' Health* Editorial Directors

Suzanne Tate  
Cincinnati VA Campus

Judy Nassmacher  
Dayton VA Campus

Debbie Page  
VA Healthcare System of Ohio





## Updated pharmacy co-payment

For the past 10 years, the co-payment for a 30-day prescription supply was just \$2. Yet from 1990 to 2000, the cost to VA for medications rose from \$715 million to \$2.1 billion. That drastic increase has led to a national change: In early 2002, the co-payment for medication received for a nonservice-connected condition on an outpatient basis will rise to \$7.

Veterans exempt from the prescription co-payment include those who:

- are 50 percent or more service connected
- receive medication for a service-connected condition
- have an income below the maximum amount of VA pensions

For veterans in certain priority groups, the maximum annual out-of-pocket cap for the new co-payment is \$840. Under the new regulations, this cap and the co-payment may increase with inflation. **VH**

## Don't be a 'no show'

We are working hard to provide our enrollees with timely care. We know there will be times when you cannot keep a scheduled appointment. If you don't call us to cancel your appointment, the time cannot be used to allow another veteran to receive care. Not showing up puts your VA healthcare team on hold, wasting valuable time. This is a problem for many of our clinics across the Network. Please, if you are unable to make your appointment, call and let us know. Don't be a "no show"! **VH**

## Get vaccinated!

Now is the time to get your pneumovax. This vaccination guards against a type of bacteria that can cause meningitis and pneumonia. Those most in need of immunization include people over age 65; adults with chronic lung or heart problems; and people with severe asthma, diabetes or a weakened immune system.



## Taking on the world

For three years, veteran Jack McIlhargey went to numerous doctors, trying to find out what was causing him to be sick. It was

when he saw a doctor at the Cincinnati VA campus that he was finally diagnosed with Wegener's disease.

Wegener's disease is a rare autoimmune disorder characterized by inflamed blood vessels. McIlhargey has an ocular form of the disease, meaning his eyes are particularly affected. Adam Kaufman, M.D., an ophthalmologist who specializes in cornea surgery, worked with McIlhargey to find the best treatment, which included medication and subsequent eye surgery. McIlhargey now has his disease under control.

"They gave me back to my kids and gave me back to my life," he says.

But Dr. Kaufman influenced McIlhargey's life in other ways, too. It was at his suggestion that McIlhargey further pursued his passion for music. Early in his illness, McIlhargey could not leave the house because his eyes were extremely sensitive to light. When medication stopped the light sensitivity, McIlhargey was able to fulfill a simple wish: going to a bookstore to read a newspaper. While there, he

noticed a piano and asked if he could play. For the next four years, McIlhargey played piano in the bookstore, all the while composing new pieces and recording them. Dr. Kaufman heard the recordings and recommended he do something with music. So McIlhargey made a compact disc and presented the first copy to the doctor. During one of his eye surgeries, his music was played and the doctors bought copies. They now listen to it during other surgeries.

"They not only saved my life but turned my life around," McIlhargey says. He now sells his music through his website, [www.mack-mallon.com](http://www.mack-mallon.com) **VH**

# Could it be post-traumatic stress disorder?

**I**n an attempt to live through a waking nightmare, some people might try to push a traumatic incident to the back of their minds. However, some memories are too strong to be forgotten. A sound, an image or a certain odor can bring painful memories back with full force, causing a person to experience the original terror in an otherwise normal setting.

After an emotionally overwhelming event such as war, a violent crime, sexual trauma or other trauma, people may develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD can trigger symptoms like depression, anxiety, anger or recurring disturbing nightmares.

“A person can develop PTSD after any significant trauma,” says Dewleen Baker, M.D., division director of the PTSD Post-Deployment Program at the Cincinnati campus. “People with PTSD often re-experience the event with all its original feelings.”

PTSD can persist for years and eventually disrupt daily life. The symptoms can begin immediately after the trauma or can be delayed for a long time, affecting an individual months or even years after the event. Such psychological reactions and symptoms are not uncommon and, left unchecked, can lead to more serious problems such as social difficulties with family members, friends and co-workers; encounters with the law; and even substance abuse.

## Common symptoms of PTSD

- feeling of detachment from other people
- distressing trauma-related dreams and nightmares
- feeling of reliving traumatic experiences
- uncontrollable memories of war or other trauma
- inability to remember important parts of the traumatic event
- intense distress at reminders of a traumatic experience
- exaggerated startle response
- lack of interest in everyday activities
- difficulty concentrating
- sleep problems
- irritability or angry outbursts
- inability to experience loving feelings



## Barriers to PTSD treatment

Asking for help from healthcare professionals may be difficult for some people and seemingly impossible for others. Often, people feel that if they haven't sought help in the past for a longstanding problem, why do it now?

Although most don't hesitate to get a physical ailment treated, many keep psychological issues hidden. Often, people with emotional problems may wonder whether they really need help and doubt whether anyone could possibly make a difference in how they feel.

And many people might want to avoid talking about themselves and the painful experiences that may have given rise to their suffering. These kinds of feelings are common and usually give way to feelings of relief and reduced stress levels when help is finally sought.

## How can treatment help PTSD?

Both VA medical centers and Readjustment Counseling Services (Vet Centers) have expert staff able to treat PTSD. The PTSD Post-Deployment Programs are specifically set up for that purpose.

"Treatment is available, and it really can get better," Dr. Baker says. "Veterans need to be actively involved in their treatment."



Dr. Baker says treatment is tailored to individuals based on an assessment, which includes a physical exam, interviews and scales that measure the severity of the PTSD. Treatment may include an outpatient day program or a day hospital. Group therapy and medication may also be used.

The treatment can help the veteran identify symptoms of PTSD and current life problems and learn to cope more effectively with traumatic memories.

"People can learn to manage PTSD," says Dr. Baker. "And we are here to help."

For more information on PTSD, contact your nearest VA medical center. Phone numbers are listed on the back page. **VH**

## Losing a loved one: Take time to heal

Expectations have no place when it comes to grief. How any of us will react to the loss of a loved one, how we will feel or how long those feelings will last are questions that only time can answer.

Even though each mourning experience is unique, most people go through similar stages. While the loss is fresh, for instance, you may find it hard to believe that your loved one is gone. And the road to acceptance will surely be paved with many day-to-day adjustments, such as setting one less place at the dinner table.

If you're mourning, you might wonder if what you're feeling is normal. Changes in appetite and sleep patterns, stomach problems and fatigue are common in the months after a loss. You may also notice mood swings or have difficulty concentrating. It's also normal to sense your loved one's presence and even "hear" his or her voice.

Sometimes grief so paralyzes a mourner that he or she is unable to enjoy life again. Signs that a person may be stuck in the grieving process include:

- social withdrawal
- a loss of interest in once pleasurable activities
- an inability to speak of the deceased without feeling intense grief
- an inability to move toward future growth
- continued refusal to accept the loved one's death and hope for a reunion
- a tendency to self-destructive behavior

In such cases, professional counseling can help the mourner move forward.

Remember, the grief process is one of movement and each person progresses at his or her own rate. There is no wrong or right way to grieve, and there is no time frame. **VH**

# Diabetes: A disease you can control—or prevent

About 16 million Americans have diabetes—and that number is increasing rapidly. Between 1991 and 2000, the number of Americans with diabetes rose 49 percent. Here in Ohio, the increase was 60 percent.

Why such an alarming change? Many reasons are suspected, but one thing is clear: Lifestyle has a major impact on diabetes, and much can be done to control and even prevent it.

## What is diabetes?

In diabetes, the body doesn't use blood sugar, or glucose, efficiently. That's because insulin—the hormone responsible for helping glucose enter the body's cells—is either absent, present in small amounts or otherwise unable to do its job.

There are two main types of diabetes. Type 1, or juvenile-onset, diabetes affects mainly children and young adults. Far more common is type 2, or adult-onset, diabetes. Ninety percent to 95 percent of all diabetes cases are type 2, which usually develops after age 45.

"There is a progressive nature to diabetes," says Jan Anselmo, R.D., C.D.E., clinical coordinator of food and nutrition services at the Cleveland campus. "As you age, you're at an increased risk."

Other risk factors for type 2 diabetes include a family history of diabetes; being overweight; not

exercising regularly; and low HDL, or "good," cholesterol levels.

## Symptoms you shouldn't ignore

The symptoms of type 2 diabetes develop gradually. According to Anselmo, the most telling signs of diabetes are excessive thirst, frequent urination and persistent hunger. Others include:

- fatigue
- weight loss, even with increased appetite
- blurred vision, sudden loss of vision in either eye or seeing black spots
- frequent infections

## Diabetes-Agent Orange benefits

Final rules for benefits for Vietnam veterans with type 2 diabetes were published in the *Federal Register*. Those rules don't take effect for 60 days. However, VA offices are accepting claims from eligible Vietnam veterans.

Veterans affected by the rules will receive a priority for VA healthcare and, depending on their illnesses, disability compensation from \$101 to \$2,107 monthly.

This follows a report by the National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine that found "limited/suggestive" evidence of a link between type 2 diabetes and Agent Orange and other herbicides used in Vietnam.



- slow healing of sores
- tingling or numbness in your hands or feet

If you experience any of these, see your VA primary care provider for a checkup.

## Prevention and control are key

The good news: Those with type 2 diabetes can work to control the disease. Most often, this is done by following a special diet to control blood sugar levels, getting more active and losing weight. At times, medication may be necessary.

For those who don't have the disease, there's even better news: At least 75 percent of new cases can be prevented by similar measures.

"The prevention is basic—get up and move," Anselmo says. "You can really make a difference with lifestyle changes."

For those with the disease, Anselmo recommends following the ABCs of diabetes control:

- Hemoglobin A1c test to measure blood sugar levels. This should be done twice a year.
- Blood pressure checks. Diabetes increases the risk for heart disease. Blood pressure should be checked every doctor's visit.
- Cholesterol tests. High cholesterol, especially elevated LDL, or "bad," cholesterol contributes to clogged arteries. Check cholesterol levels once a year.

## VA is here to help

VA offers many resources for people with diabetes. Education on self-management is available, as is nutrition counseling. Those veterans on medication for their diabetes may also receive assistance with self blood-sugar tests.

It is important for those with diabetes to work with their doctors. Anselmo advises everyone learn the basics of diabetes and let their doctor know of any changes in their health.

"People with diabetes need to know that they are responsible and part of a team," Anselmo says. "And they should be an active partner in this team." **VH**

# The complications of diabetes

Diabetes affects several bodily functions. Because the condition can cause a variety of complications, including the ones listed below, it's important to report any symptoms to your VA primary care provider.

- **Cardiovascular disease.** People with diabetes are two to four times more likely to have heart disease. Because diabetes disrupts the way food is processed, fats are more likely to stick to artery walls. This speeds up the development of atherosclerosis, or clogging of the arteries.

- **Eye problems.** Diabetic retinopathy, or damage to blood vessels in the retina, can lead to blindness. In fact, diabetes is the leading cause of new cases in blindness for those ages 20 to 74. Warning signs include blurred vision that lasts more than a day; loss of vision in either eye; and spots, lines or flashing lights in your field of vision. It's important for people with diabetes to have regular eye exams—sometimes as often as yearly depending on a person's blood sugar control.

- **Nervous-system damage.** A condition known as diabetic neuropathy causes the nerves to become progressively less sensitive. Most commonly affected are the long nerves running from the spine to the fingers and toes. Neuropathy can also affect the nerves that control bladder function, digestion and blood pressure, especially if the person has had diabetes for some years. The feet are particularly prone to problems. Those with diabetes should perform daily foot checks and have their doctor examine their feet.

- **Kidney disease.** People who have had diabetes for a number of years are at higher risk for kidney disease, which can affect other organs, especially the heart. Diabetes can cause damage because high glucose levels make the kidneys filter too much blood, overworking them. Water retention may be a sign of kidney disease. **VH**



# Reaching Us Is Easy

Keep this information handy—when you need us, we'll be there.

## Akron VA Campus

676 South Broadway Street  
Suite 203  
Akron, OH 44311  
330-344-4177

## Athens VA Campus

510 West Union Street  
Athens, OH 45701  
740-593-7314

## Bellevue VA Campus

103 Landmark Drive  
Bellevue, KY 41073  
859-392-3840

## Brecksville VA Campus

10000 Brecksville Road  
Brecksville, OH 44141  
216-526-3030

## Canton VA Campus

221 3rd Street SE  
Canton, OH 44702  
330-489-4660

## Chillicothe VA Campus

17273 State Route 104  
Chillicothe, OH 45601  
740-773-1141

## Cincinnati VA Campus

3200 Vine Street  
Cincinnati, OH 45220  
513-861-3100

## Clermont County VA Campus

Eastgate Professional  
Office Park  
4355 Ferguson Drive  
Suite 270  
Cincinnati, OH 45245  
513-943-3680

## Columbus VA Campus

543 Taylor Avenue  
Columbus, OH 43203  
614-257-5200

## Dayton VA Campus

4100 West Third Street  
Dayton, OH 45428  
937-268-6511

## East Liverpool VA Campus

332 West 6th Street  
East Liverpool, OH 43920  
330-386-4303

## Ft. Thomas VA Campus

1000 So. Ft. Thomas Avenue  
Ft. Thomas, KY 41075  
606-572-6202

## Grove City VA Campus

1953 Ohio Avenue  
Grove City, OH 43123  
614-257-5800

## Hillsboro VA Campus

135 North High Street  
Hillsboro, OH 45133  
937-393-8176

## Lancaster VA Campus

1550 Sheridan Drive  
Colonnade Medical Building  
Lancaster, OH 43130  
740-653-6145

## Lawrenceburg VA Campus

555 Eads Parkway  
Suite 203  
Lawrenceburg, IN 47025  
812-539-2313

## Lima VA Campus

1220 E. Elm St.  
Suite 110  
Lima, OH 45804  
419-227-9676

## Lorain VA Campus

205 West 20th Street  
Lorain, OH 44052  
440-244-3833

## Louis Stokes VA Campus

10701 East Boulevard  
Cleveland, OH 44106  
216-791-3800

## Mansfield VA Campus

1456 Park Avenue West  
Mansfield, OH 44906  
419-529-4602

## Marietta VA Campus

418 Colegate Drive  
Marietta, OH 45750  
740-568-0412

## McCafferty VA Campus

4242 Lorain Avenue  
Cleveland, OH 44113  
216-939-0699

## Middletown VA Campus

675 North University Blvd.  
Middletown, OH 45042  
513-423-8387

## Otis Moss/University

Hospital VA Campus  
8819 Quincy Avenue  
Cleveland, OH 44106  
216-721-7221

## Painesville VA Campus

W 7 Jackson Street  
Painesville, OH 44077  
440-357-6740

## Portsmouth VA Campus

621 Broadway Street  
Portsmouth, OH 45662  
740-353-3236

## Richmond VA Campus

4351 South A Street  
Richmond, IN 47371  
765-973-6915

## Sandusky VA Campus

3416 Columbus Avenue  
Sandusky, OH 44870  
419-625-7350

## Springfield VA Campus

512 South Burnett Road  
Springfield, OH 45505  
937-328-3385

## Warren VA Campus

Riverside Square  
1400 Tod Avenue NW  
Warren, OH 44485  
330-392-0311

## Youngstown VA Campus

2031 Belmont Avenue  
Youngstown, OH 44505  
330-740-9200

## Zanesville VA Campus

840 Bethesda Drive  
Building 3A  
Zanesville, OH 43701  
740-453-7725

Call Tele-Nurse at 1-888-838-6446. • Visit us online at: [www.va.gov/visn10/](http://www.va.gov/visn10/)

VA Healthcare System of Ohio  
11500 Northlake Drive, Suite 200  
Cincinnati, OH 45249



PRSR STD  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
LEBANON JUNCTION, KY  
PERMIT NO. 19